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Source: *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 1989, Vol. 119 (1989), pp. 62-78

Published by: Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25508971

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Of Beasts and Banners
The Origin of the Heraldic Enfield

N. J. A. Williams

The enfield, a curious hybred beast, is largely confined to Irish heraldry. This article derives the name from Irish onchú and discusses some aspects of the animals background.

The Enfield

Of all the animals to be found in the heraldic menagerie the *enfield* is one of the most bizarre. It is an imaginary hybrid, usually described as having the head of a fox, chest of a greyhound, talons of an eagle, body of a lion and hind legs and tail of a wolf (Vinycomb 1906, 217). The enfield is moreover one of the rarest of heraldic animals. As far as I am aware, it occurs in three contexts only. The first is the coat of arms of the London Borough of Enfield (see Fig. 5), where it is both the main charge on the shield and the sinister supporter (Briggs 1971, 151, 152). These arms were granted in 1966 to replace the original arms granted in 1946 to the Urban District of Enfield, Middlesex. The enfield was the major charge in the earlier arms also (Brooke-Little 1983, 82). The choice of the enfield for the arms of Enfield was an obvious one and the armorial bearings of the borough are an excellent example of a 'canting' coat, that is to say, one in which the main charge is a pun on the bearer's name. Given the late date of the original grant to Enfield, it is quite obvious that the enfield did not begin its heraldic history in the arms in question.

The second context is derived from the first. In June 1964 William Marion Mann and his son, William Marion Mann, Jr., were granted arms by the College of Arms in London. Both bear as crest *An enfield passant sable supporting with the dexter foreleg a fleur-de-lys Or.* The enfield here is a reference to the place of origin of the grantees, namely Enfield, North Carolina, United States of America (Gayre 1969, 155).

The third context in which the enfield occurs is an exclusively Irish one. The animal is to be seen frequently in the armorial bearings of people of the surname Kelly or O'Kelly, not in the shield itself but as the crest over the helmet. Patrick Kennedy gives an illustration of the arms of O'Kelly in which the the crest is clearly an enfield (Smith 1967, fol 15). Fox-Davies lists seven armigers of the surname Kelly/O'Kelly who have an enfield in their crests (1905, 762, 1033). MacLysaght (IF 175, 216) gives the arms of O'Kelly of Uí Maine and blazons the crest: *On a ducal coronet or an enfield vert.* A version of the O'Kelly arms and crest are shown in Fig. 6. [The coat of arms of O'Kelly/Kelly is itself usually blazoned: *Azure two lions rampant combatant argent chained Or supporting a tower with three turrets of the second*]. The enfield is passant, i.e. walking on all fours, in the arms of almost all armigerous members of the O'Kelly or Kelly families. O'Kelly de Conejera (formerly of Kellysmeadow), however, bears an enfield rampant in his crest (see BLGI).

It is significant that according to MacLysaght the enfield is the crest of the O'Kellys of Uí Maine. John O'Donovan in his *Tribes and Customs of Hy Many* refers to the death at

Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge,
An Coláiste Ollscoile,
Baile Átha Cliath 4.

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the Battle of Clontarf of Tadhg Mór Ua Ceallaigh, ancestor of the O'Kellys of Uí Maine, and tells of a tradition among his descendants that explains the enfield in their crest:

> There is a tradition among the O'Kellys of Hy-Many, that they have borne as their crest an enfield, since the time of this Tadhg Mor, from a belief that this fabulous animal issued from the sea at the battle of Clontarf, to protect the body of O'Kelly from the Danes, till rescued by his followers (O'Donovan 1843, 99).

This story O'Donovan repeats in a note on the Battle of Clontarf in his edition of the *Annals of the Four Masters* where he says:

> According to a wild tradition among the O'Kellys of this race [Uí Maine], after the fall of their ancestor, Teige Mor, in the battle of Clontarf, a certain animal like a

Fig. 5 Arms of the London Borough of Enfield.

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dog (ever since used in the crest of the O'Kellys of Hy-Many), issued from the sea to protect his body from the Danes and remained guarding it till it was carried away by the Uí Maine (AFM 2, note *sub anno* 1013).

Although the O'Kelly tradition cited by O'Donovan claims that the enfield in the O'Kelly crest was suggested by this touching incident, the explanation cannot for a number of reasons be taken at face value. In the first place the story cannot by its very nature be historically accurate. In the second place heraldry did not exist anywhere in the period of the battle of Clontarf. Armorial bearings did not arrive in Ireland until the Norman Conquest, over a century and a half later. The emergence of the crest over the helmet as a separate item in the heraldic achievement was later still. The earliest crests in the modern sense date from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The Gaelic nobility were in any event slow to adopt heraldry. Only a handful of Gaelic chieftains would have had armorial bearings and crests before the fourteenth century at the very earliest. Most in fact did not adopt or receive coats of arms until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Armstrong 1905, 66-72; Barry 1970, 14-21). If the enfield was a distinctive emblem of the O'Kellys from the time of Tadhg Mor, it must have been a tribal symbol rather than as a strictly heraldic one. Later then the non-heraldic or pre-heraldic beast became incorporated into the legitimate heraldry of the O'Kellys when armorial bearings were finally acquired by them.

There are exact parallels to the enfield as pre-heraldic symbol becoming heraldic charge. One might cite, for example, the similar 'totems' of other noble Gaelic families: the Red Hand of the O'Neills, the Cat of the O'Kanes or the Robin Redbreast of the O'Sullivans. All three appear to have been distinctive badges of the respective families that were incorporated into their chiefs' arms only when they adopted heraldry of the systematic and feudal kind.

O'Donovan is quite emphatic in both his accounts that the creature believed by the O'Kellys to have guarded their ancestor's corpse was the same as that of their crest, namely the enfield. The word *enfield* is quite obviously an English one, but the O'Kellys must at least initially have recounted the tale of the enfield among themselves in Irish. The question then arises: what was the original and Irish name for the enfield? At this point I must anticipate the conclusions of the present article: I am convinced that the English word *enfield* used when referring to the beast of the O'Kellys' crest is quite simply a corruption of the Irish word *onchú.* Curiously enough I can find no reference to the enfield in any modern dictionary of English. Neither the *Oxford English Dictionary,* its Supplement nor *Webster's Dictionary* has any mention of the word.

Before we turn our attention to the discussion of the word *onchú,* two points in O'Donovan's narratives are to be noted. Firstly the animal that guarded the defenceless corpse was believed to have been an enfield, but also resembled a dog. Secondly the enfield or dog-like creature emerged from the sea to guard the body of Tadhg Mór. It was thus an aquatic rather than a terrestial creature. Both these points will be of some importance later in our discussion.

The Onchú

The word *onchú* is not infrequently met with in Middle and Classical Irish, in particular in bardic poetry. The word is of uncertain etymology. It has been suggested that that it was borrowed from the French *once, onceau* 'ounce, leopard', *onceau* being a diminutive

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Fig. 6 Arms of O'Kelly.

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of the basic form *once* (MacBain 1982, *s.v. onnchon*). The word *ounce* in English is now applied to the snow-leopard but originally referred to the lynx. It is virtually certain, however, that the Irish *onchú* is not derived from the French *once* or *onceau,* nor for that matter from the English *ounce. Once* in French (from which English *ounce* derives) is an aphetic form of *lonce;* cf. Italian *lonza* 'idem'. Both the Italian term and the French form in *l-* are the regular developments of the Late Latin *luncea,* the feminine of *lynx.* If the word *onchú* were really a Romance borrowing, one would expect it to have an initial *l* (LEIA, O-23). There are moreover further phonological difficulties in trying to identify *onchú* with *once.*

The most decisive argument against the derivation *once* > *onchú* is the following. *Onchú* is itself used in Irish as a personal name. O'Brien cites no fewer than thirteen examples (O'Brien 1962, 721). Personal names in the early period tend to be of native provenance. The anthroponym *Onchú* is clearly one of those personal names that contain the element *cú* 'hound', e.g. *Cú Chulainn, Cú-allaid, Cú-boirne, Cú-choicríche* and the exactly parallel names, *Doburchú, Faelchú, Findchú* and *Murchú.*

Onchú as a proper and a common noun is almost certainly a compound of the word *cú* 'dog, hound'. The first element, *on-,* Stokes believed originally meant 'water' and *onchú* was therefore exactly parallel with *doburchú* 'otter' <*dobur* 'water' and *cú* (Stokes 1909, 136). With **on-* 'water' one can compare the word *onfais* 'plunging' and *onfaisech* 'one who plunges, diver'. T. F. O'Rahilly (*Ériu* 13 (1942) 146) suggests that **on-* is an ablaut-grade of the word *en-* 'water' seen, for example, in the word *enach* 'marsh, wet place'. The *onchú* is a largely aquatic animal.

In *Caithréim Cellaig,* for example, we read of a fierce *onchú* that haunted the joint-pasturage (*coingelt*) between Loch Con and Loch Cuilinn. When Muiredach with his retinue came looking for Cellach, his murdered brother, the *onchú* killed nine of Muiredach's people before his own eyes. Muiredach plunged into the lake after it and finally tracked it down asleep on dry land. Muiredach attacked the *onchú*, whereupon the beast took refuge in the lake again. Muiredach pursued it, killed it and brought its head back onto the dry land. As a result of that feat Muiredach was known thereafter as *Cú Choingelt* 'Hound of the Pasturage' (Mulchrone 1971, 15). Although a hostile rather than a helping animal, the *onchú* here is exactly parallel with the enfield of the Tadhg Mór story. It emerges from water to engage in human conflict before disappearing into the water again.

The word *onchú* is sometimes associated with other animals. *Stair Ercuil,* for example, speaks of a *luindi leomhain ocus a ainbfine onchon* 'the swiftness of a lion and the wildness of an *onchú*' (Quin 1939, 70). Similarly *Eachtra Uilliam* associates the *onchú* with the bear and the lion, when it describes the hero *Amhail bheithir ar bheóchroidhe nó leomhan ar lúthmhaireacht nó onchoin ar aigmhéile,* 'Like a bear in vigour, a lion in agility or an *onchú* in its fearsomeness' (C. O'Rahilly 1949, 97). The author of *Cath Fionntrágha* speaks of Oscar as follows: *an leoman luathfhergach 7 an nathair neimh[eg]lach 7 an onchú irghaili* 'the lion swift to wrath, the fearless serpent, the *onchú* of valour' (C. O'Rahilly 1975, 14). Pádraigín Haicéad alludes to Richard Butler as *An bheithir onchon osgardha i ngábhadh* 'The bear *onchú,* heroic in danger' (Ní Cheallacháin 1962, 57).

Not infrequently the word *onchú* has an extended sense and refers to a doughty hero. *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh,* for example, describes the Dalcassians as *onchoin athi, atluma na Banba buadaichi* 'the terrible, nimble *onchoin* of victorious Banba' (Todd 1867, 160). This usage is common in bardic poetry. Muireadhach Ó Dálaigh in his appeal to O'Donnell addresses him thus:

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Ní dó sin adtrásta atú,
a mheic Uilliam, a onchú (Bergin 1970, 89)

[Not upon this do I dwell now, O son of William, thou *onchú*].

Muiris Ó hEodhasa says of Maguire:

léim ar áth 'gun onchoinsin
as cách ag béin bharrthuislidh (Greene 1972, 196)

[everyone is felled by that *onchú,* as he leaps over the ford of battle].

This metaphorical use of *onchú* is reminiscent of the similar use of such terms as *leoghan* 'lion', *dreagan* 'dragon' and *seabhac* 'hawk' (See Knott 1926, 214; T. F. O'Rahilly 1927, 106). Muiris Mac Dáibhí Dhuibh Mhic Gearailt even uses the word *onchú* along with similar terms as a metaphor for a fine steed:

M'onchú bheodha, ar seabhac saor,
leomhan re leadradh na sluagh (Williams 1979, 36)

[My vital *onchú*, my noble hawk, a lion at the hacking of the hosts]

The word *onchú* frequently also bears a secondary meaning and one that is highly relevant to the present discussion. *Onchú* often refers to a banner or standard, 'probably originally one on which an "onchú" was depicted' (DIL s.v.). The *onchú* may have referred to a three-dimensional model on a pole as well as a two-dimensional depiction on a banner. Compare the three-dimensional Dragon of Wessex that was according to the Bayeux Tapestry, King Harold's standard at Hastings (for this question and others concerning the *onchú* see Hayes-McCoy 1979, 15-8).

The sense 'banner, standard' is the only one in *In Cath Catharda,* for example, where *oncoin obeli* (Stokes 1909, 236 line 3108; 266 line 3530), *onchona craebhacha cróderga* (ibid., 364 line 4926) and *onchona corpchaela craesderga* (ibid., 398 line 5434) are various alliterative phrases referring to *onchú* banners. A poem to Richard Bourke, Earl of Clanrickard, says:

Laoich mheara ag maidhm dá n-iallaibh,
Scaoiltear leo lá in mhórfhiadhaigh
dá n-onchonaibh sróill ar seilg
'na mbróin chonfadhaigh ceinndeirg (Carney 1945, 35)

[Swift warriors burst from their leashes, on the day of the mighty hunt they release to the chase their *onchoin* of satin as a frenzied crimson-headed throng].

The editor, James Carney (1945, 170–71), takes the word *onchoin* (nom. plural) to mean 'warrior', but he says that the poet 'is playing with the secondary meaning "battle-standard"'. The word *onchú* even refers to a device upon a shield. Ó hEodhasa, reassuring Maguire after the recapture of Enniskillen by the English in 1595, tells him that the Irish will yet be victorious:

Do-bhéara deallradh dornchladh,
lí sgiamhdha sgiath n-óronchon,
solus meirge ngairthe nglan,
aighthe do leirge ar lasadh (Bergin 1970, 131)

[The glitter of sword-hilts, the lovely hue of shields with golden *onchoin,* the lustre of bright shining banners, will set the faces on thy castle's slope ablaze].

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The *onchú,* then, is a fierce animal of the dog tribe, on occasion water-dwelling, that sometimes involves itself in human conflicts. It was so often used as a device on the Gaelic battle-standard, that the term *onchú* actually became applied to the standard itself. It is *a priori* highly likely that the *onchú* and the enfield are one and the same. It remains to elucidate the nature of that identity. The matter can be dealt with under four heads: (1) phonological; (2) historical; (3) zoological; (3) mythological.

Phonological Considerations

Onchú like *cú* 'hound' is feminine; it has an accusative/dative *onchoin* and a genitive *onchon* (later *onchainn* and *onchann* respectively). It seems that in some dialects the oblique stem was generalised in the nominative. Dinneen (1927, s.v.), for example, cites the singular *onchoinn* in the phrase *dhá onchoinn luatha* which he glosses 'two swift otters'. Similarly in Scottish Gaelic dictionaries the word appears either as *onchonn* (MacLennan 1925, *s.v.*) or *onnchon* (MacBain 1982, *s.v.*; Dwelly 1977, *s.v.*; Dwelly also cites the Irish form *onchu* from Alexander Forbes's book on the Gaelic names of beasts). A parallel is the Irish for 'eel'. The old nominative was *escú* (literally 'hound of the waterfall') but the oblique stem has been generalised in the modern language, where the word is always *eascann* (< genitive *escon*) or *eascainn* (< accusative/dative *escoin*). I assume that the normal form of *onchú* in spoken Early Modern Irish was **onchann* or *onchainn.*

Onchainn would have been pronounced [onəxəN′] or [onxəN′]. There are or rather were dialects of Irish in which the group [nx] developed as [nf]. An example of the change of [nx] to [nf] is to be seen in the surname *Dunphy* from an earlier *Ó Donnchaidh.* The more normal development of the name is found in the variant *O'Donoghue* from *Ó Donnchadha.* One should also mention here the Hiberno-English surname *Murphy* which derives from an Irish form *Ó/Mac Murchaidh.* The customary Gaelicisation of *Murphy* is *Ó Murchú* < *Ó Murchadha,* the commoner Irish variant of the surname. Where *Ó Donnchaidh* became **Ó Donnfaidh* (> *Dunphy*) *onchainn* might be expected to give **onfainn.* The shift of [nx] to [nf] in these cases as well as in **Ó/Mac Murfaidh* > *Murphy* occurs immediately after an originally rounded vowel, where the consonant cluster is itself velarised. The intermediate stage was presumably [nh] where the [h], though weaker than [x], was nonetheless strongly articulated, and the lips were rounded because of the preceding broad vowel and consonant.

I suggest **onfainn* as the hypothetical spoken form, but we have also to consider more exactly the quality of the vowel of the first syllable. There is evidence that *onchú, onchainn* may also have been pronounced *anchú, anchainn* in some dialects. O'Flaherty writing in 1684 of a monster in Lough Mask says that such creatures are known by the name *Anchú* (Hardiman 1846, 19). There is moreover a lake near Glendalough in county Wicklow known in Irish apparently as *Loch na nOnchon* (Hogan 1910, 503; Dinneen 1927, *s.v. onchú*). The English name is variously given as *Loch na hanagan* (Hogan), *Lough Nahanagan* (Price 1945, 45; Danaher 1964, 100) and *Loch Nahangan* (Dinneen). Both English forms would seem to derive from a variant with a genitive singular **Loch na hOnchon* 'the lake of the *onchú*'. It would seem, then, that in the spoken Irish of county Galway and county Wicklow the word *onchú, onchainn* had *a* rather than *o* in the first syllable.

O'Rahilly says of the alternation of *o* and *a*: 'The tendency of stressed *a* and *o* to interchange goes back to Old Irish. The change of *o* to *a* is especially common'. He goes on to point out that in this matter Northern Irish is more likely to lower *o* to *a*

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than the Irish of Munster, and that Manx and Scottish Gaelic are more likely still (T. F. O'Rahilly 1972, 192-93). The tendency of Northern Irish in general to lower *o* to *a* will become relevant in a moment. We must incidentally assume that the lowered *a* from earlier *o* was still rounded enough to trigger the shift [nh] > [nf].

Interestingly our hypothetical form **anfainn* is itself attested. Price (1945, 45) cites two further variants of the name of Lough Nahanagan: *Lough Nahansun* (1790) and *Lough Nahanfan* (1822). I assume that the earlier of these is the result of a misreading of *f* as long *s*. If so, then we have two forms with *nf* for *nch*. If not, we have at least one. The names in question imply a spoken form in the Irish of county Wicklow **Loch na hAnfann*. It is also probable that the variant *anfainn* was also known elsewhere in Ireland. As far as I am aware, there is no other evidence that [x] in non-initial position became [h] in Wicklow, but then our knowledge of the Irish of Wicklow is very limited. In Ulster and Oriel, however, [x] certainly did weaken to [h] in non-initial position. It is significant in this context that both *Dunphy* and *Murphy* are the Northern or Oriel forms of the respective surnames. The commoner *O'Donoghue* (< *Ó Donnchadha*) and *Ó Murchú* (< *Ó Murchadha*) are the normal developments of the names in the South of Ireland. I assume that the spoken variant *anfainn* was widespread in Northern and Eastern Ireland.

There is something of a tendency in the Gaelic languages for final *n*, both broad and slender, to alternate with *l* in certain circumstances. As examples one might cite the following: *airneán* 'night-visiting' and its variant *airneál*; *Oebinn*, the name of the banshee of the Dál gCais, later *Oíbell, Aoibheall; Iodáil, Eadáil* 'Italy' and the variant *Eadáin*; Irish *aiteann* 'furze' and Scottish Gaelic *aiteal* 'juniper' (originally 'furze'). Compare also *áin/áil* 'wish, pleasure' and the Waterford form *nín* for *níl* 'is not'.

In *anfainn* the presence of *n* in two consecutive syllables, I suggest, was enough to set in train the dissimilation of the word to **anfaill*, i.e. with the double or unlenited final *n* shifting to unlenited *l*. It was in this form that the word was borrowed into Hiberno-English. The long final *l* was probably sufficiently different from English *l* to warrant its representation in English as *ld* rather than simple *l*. Compare English *MacDonald* from Gaelic *Mac Domhnaill*. Some varieties of Hiberno-English moreover have a tendency to raise vowels before following *n* + consonant, so that, for example, *end* is pronounced *ind*. Applying both these English phonological rules to our hypothetical Irish borrowing **anfaill* we obtain the form **enfild*, i.e. almost exactly the shape of the word as it is attested. To sum up, then, the natural reflex of *onchainn* in Hiberno-English could easily have been **enfild* through the stages **anfild* < **anfaill* < *anfainn* < *anchainn* < *onchainn*.

There occurs in English heraldic treatises from the late fifteenth century onwards a beast known as the *alphyn*. Like the enfield it is a hybrid and 'bears an erratic resemblance to the heraldic tyger' (Dennys 1976). The alphyn was used as a badge by the West family, Lords de la Warr. The first occurrence of it is *ca* 1470 where it is depicted with cloven hooves and a straight tufted tail. An example of it (Fig. 7) from the sixteenth century Book of Standards (College of Arms MS I.2, fol 82) shows it with the forelegs and feet of an eagle and with a knotted tail (for the alphyn see Dennys 1976, 146-47; London 1954, 139-40 and Fox-Davies 1985, 175 note 112).

The word *alphyn* in English has been identified with the Middle English term *alfin* 'bishop' in chess. *Alfin* is borrowed from Old French and is ultimately derived from the Arabic *al-fil* 'the elephant', for the bishop in chess was in former times frequently represented as an elephant. There are difficulties with the identification *alphyn* = *alfin*, however. In the first place the alphyn does not bear even the slightest resemblance to

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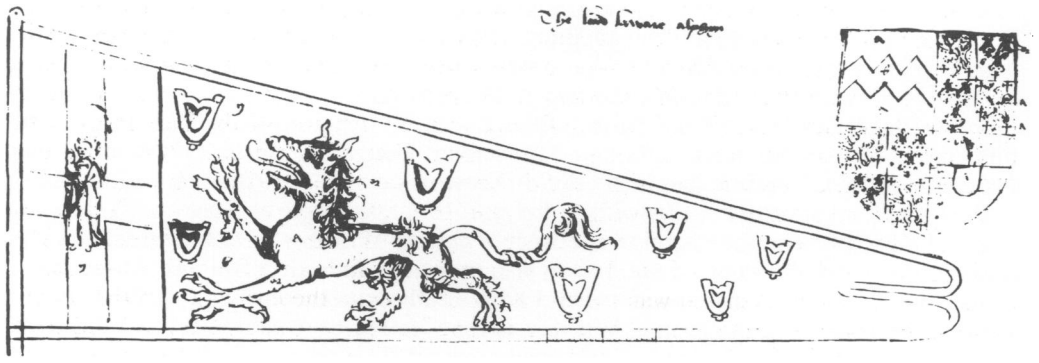

Fig. 7 The Alphyn from the Book of Standards.

the elephant, and the elephant itself is not uncommon in heraldry. In the second place the alphyn is not found among the beasts described in the mediaeval bestiaries. When it is first attested at the end of the fifteenth century, it appears from nowhere.

The alphyn is a fierce hybrid animal that is shown on occasion with the forelimbs of an eagle. Its name moreover is similar to our hypothetical Irish variant **anfaill*. I would suggest that the similarity of *alphyn* to *alfin* is coincidental and that *alphyn* is rather a metathesised variant of **anfaill* and is thus of Irish origin.

Historical Considerations

The Gaelic Revival that began in Ireland in the first half of the fourteenth century resulted in a noticeable weakening of the English colony in the country. As the Norman colonists lost territory to the Gaelic chieftains Ireland became less feudal and returned rather to a Gaelic and tribal society. Literary evidence suggests that the O'Kellys were deeply involved in this revival. In 1351, for example, William Ó Ceallaigh, the chief of his kindred held a feast for the poets of Ireland in his castle of Gáille. That the feast was a major social event involving considerable cost is apparent from Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's poem on the occasion, *Filidh Éirionn go haointeach* (*Ériu* 5 (1911), 50–69). The celebration is mentioned in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* and is indicative of Ó Ceallaigh's attachment to the revitalised traditions of the Gaelic aristocracy. Resistance to the feudal practice of heraldry was noted at a later date by the English to be a distinguishing feature of the way of life of the Gaelic chieftains (Barry 1970, 21). The O'Kellys are unlikely therefore to have adopted heraldry during the fourteenth century, even though they almost certainly would have regarded the *onchú* as their special beast at this period.

It seems probable that the Gaelic nobility did not adopt arms to any great extent until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Barry 1970, 18–20). This was the period of the Kildare Ascendancy. From 1470 to 1534 Ireland was ruled by an earl of Kildare. The Geraldines as a Norman and feudal family had long had coats of arms, but they had also become Gaelicised and were widely intermarried with leading Gaelic families. It seems likely that many of the Gaelic nobility began to adopt heraldry quite simply in imitation of the Kildare lords of Ireland.

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If the O'Kellys of Uí Maine did adopt armorial bearings in the period ca 1470–1530, they were still in all probability speaking Irish more than any other language. Their Connaught dialect would have spoken of the *onchú, onchainn* or *anchainn*, not of the *anfainn*. I assume that **anfaill* (<*anfainn*) emerged as a variant of the word *onchainn* in the Irish of Oriel and found its way thence into the English of the Pale in the latter half of the fifteenth century. It seems to me likely that the Irish officers of arms were the channel through which the Irish **anfaill* became the Hiberno-English enfield.

We know very little of such officers in the fifteenth century. Thomas Collyer was 'Ireland King of Arms' in the reign of Henry VI (1422-61). He was also Clarenceux King of Arms for England south of the Trent. Whether he held both offices simultaneously is not known. Thomas Ashwell was Ireland King of Arms in the early part of the reign of Edward IV (1461-83). Ashwell is believed by one authority to have been related to the Ashwells who were heralds in England at the same period. Walter Bellinger was Ireland King of Arms during the reigns of Edward IV, Edward V (1483) and Richard III (1483-85). Bellinger was a native of Dieppe and in the years 1477–83 he was in dispute with Thomas Holme, Clarenceux, as to whether he had the right to grant arms in England. Bellinger was deprived of office at the accession of Henry VII, and nothing is known of any other King of Arms in Ireland until the appointment of the first Ulster King of Arms in 1552 (T. B. Butler 1943– [no pagination]). At all events I assume that one or other of these Kings of Arms, or members of their staffs were responsible for introducing the term **anfaill/enfield* into the heraldic vocabulary of English-speaking Ireland.

The Lords de la Warr were a very distinguished English family, strongly Lancastrian during the Wars of the Roses, who appear to have had no connection with Ireland at least until the end of the sixteenth century [Thomas West, twelfth Lord de la Warr, was knighted in Dublin in 1599 by the Earl of Essex; in 1610 he was appointed Governor and Captain-General of Virginia (Dennys 1976, 186)]. How and why they came to adopt the alphyn as their badge is a mystery. A number of similar curious hybrid animals appear in English heraldry at about the same time, i.e. in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. I would suggest that it was the Irish officers of arms who were the conduit through which the alphyn (< Irish **alfainn*) was introduced into English heraldry. The alphyn may well have been brought to England in the period of office of Collyer or Ashwell. It is to be noted that both Ireland Kings had strong connections with England.

Zoological Considerations

Several questions remain concerning the actual appearance of the enfield as commonly represented in heraldry. It is curious, for example, that a fabulous water-dog should have been imagined as having the forelimbs of an eagle. Eagles' claws would, one would think, be among the most unsuitable appendages possible for a creature that lived for the most part under water.

If the *onchú/enfield* on its arrival in heraldry were to be likened to anything, it would be with the sea-dog. The latter is not common in heraldry. Fox-Davies says that is known to him under the name of sea-dog only as the supporters of the Barons of Stourton and in the crest of Dodge. A similar animal occurs elsewhere in heraldry, as the sinister supporter of the arms of the City of Oxford, for example, but is usually blazoned as a 'beaver'. Fox-Davies (1985, 155) is of the opinion that the sea-dog is only an early attempt at a pictorial representation of the beaver. The sea-dog as it is usually shown closely resembles the heraldic dog or talbot, but with a prominent dorsal fin and webbed

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Fig. 8 The heraldic Sea-dog.

feet (Fig. 8). It is not inconceivable that the *onchú*/alphyn/enfield on its adoption into heraldry was assimilated to such a beast. The conspicuously webbed fore-paws might then have been taken for the talons of an eagle or other bird of prey. This, I assume, is how a largely aquatic creature came to be thought of as having eagle's claws. Notice incidentally that the sea-dog as supporter in the arms of the City of Oxford is vert (green). The enfield of the O'Kellys is always green.

It is also probably significant that some authorities describe the enfield as being maned. Woodward and Burnett, for example, describe the enfield thus: 'An imaginary animal of very rare occurrence, having the head of a fox, maned, the fore-legs are those of an eagle, the body and hind-legs those of a greyhound, and the tail that of a lion' (1969, 685). The 'mane' of the animal may quite conceivably be a transformation of the dorsal fin of the sea-dog that starts at the back of the head and runs down the whole of the back to the tail.

Mythological Considerations

It is not possible to explain precisely how and why the O'Kellys of Uí Maine adopted the *onchú*/enfield as their tribal emblem. The incident of the enfield at Clontarf is clearly apocryphal. Indeed it is likely, I think, that the *onchú* was already closely associated with the Uí Maine in the pagan period.

Anne Ross has pointed out that the dog plays a significant role in the religious iconography of the pagan Celts. Moreover the dog is frequently connected with water

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deities. The British god Nodons (Irish *Nuadu*) was venerated at Lydney Park, Glos., on the River Severn and was the central figure in a cult of healing waters. He was also particularly associated with dogs. Similarly votive statues of dogs have been recovered from the well of the goddess Coventina at Carrawbrough in Northumberland and elsewhere (Ross 1967, 423–26). As Anne Ross stresses personal names containing the element *ci/cyn–, cú* 'dog, hound' are abundant in Welsh and Irish. There can be no doubt that the pagan Celts venerated the animal they referred to as 'dog'. Given the association of the animal with water, however, it is probable that it was frequently imagined as an otter rather than as an ordinary domestic dog. The Irish and Welsh words for 'otter' are *doburchú* and *dyfrgi* respectively, and both derive from a hypothetical **dubrokū–* 'water-hound'. Notice also that in Modern Irish the otter is more usually known as *madra uisce* 'water dog'. It seems to me likely that the pagan Celts venerated a carnivorous animal which they called 'dog', but which included in its aquatic form the otter. This latter animal was probably in Irish at least in its fiercer manifestations known as *onchú*. Yet there is more to the matter than that, for the *onchú* is neither simply a fierce dog nor an otter but a hybrid animal with apparently reptilian attributes.

In *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* the *onchú* is listed in an inventory of venomous beasts that includes toads, scorpions, dragons and snakes (Todd 1867, 158). Part of the list reads: *a fulib drecon . . . is onchon is nathrach . . . aithnemneach* 'from the blood of dragons . . . and *onchoin* and very venomous . . . snakes'. The *onchú* in Caithréim Cellaig lives in a lake and is referred to as *piast* 'worm' or 'serpent' as well as *onchú*. A poem by Maol Muire Bacach Mág Craith describes the animal figure of a Gaelic war-standard both as an *onchú* and as a *piast*:

> Tóigeóbhthar riasan ttor chleth
> onchú dathchorcra dhuaibhsech;
> cló fraochda ad-chiú ar an ccoin
> nach maolfa riú ar na rochtuin.
>
> Súil uirthe budh aimlesc linn
> re huathbhásoidhe a hinnill;
> pést uaibhreach nertmar nemhtrom
> rechtmar uaibhreach ingenchorr (Knott 1926, 214).
>
> [There will be raised on high before the bush (?) of spears the grim, crimson-hued *onchú*; a ferocious aspect I see on the hound, which will not abate when it is reached. We care not to regard it, so appalling is its appearance, a haughty mighty deadly venomous *péist*, furious, arrogant and sharp-clawed].

A creature is still believed to infest Lough Nahanagan (< Loch na hOnchon) in county Wicklow, yet the animal in question is apparently in English sometimes called a *piast*.

The *onchú* of Irish tradition, then, is clearly a hybrid, half reptile and half mammalian. As such a creature living under lakes it is similar to many other lake-dwelling water-monsters indigenous to Ireland and Britain. Of these imaginary creatures the best known by far is the Loch Ness Monster, yet Ireland has always been more than adequately endowed with such animals.

Graham McEwan in a recent, popular though well-researched study gives an account of the sightings of lake-monsters in Ireland in the last two centuries (McEwan 1986). Such creatures are sometimes called 'horse-eels' or 'water-horses' and are believed to be partially mammalian and partially serpentine. Their back portions often resemble eels

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(Irish *eascú, eascann* 'waterfall hound'), though they have the heads and fore-parts of horses, sheep or other domestic animals. They are often horned and have four legs. When first sighted they are not infrequently taken for otters. O'Flaherty tells of a 'crocodile' that emerged from Lough Mask. His account is worth quoting in full:

> Here is one rarity more [i.e. in Lough Mask], which we may terme the Irish crocodil, whereof one as yet living, about ten years ago, had sad experience. The man was passing the shore just by the waterside and spyed far off the head of a beast swimming, which he tooke to have been an otter, and tooke no more notice of it; but the beast it seems there lifted up his head, to discern whereabouts the man was; then diving, swom under the water till he struck ground, whereupon he runned out of the water suddenly, and tooke the man by the elbow, whereby the man stooped down, and the beast fastened his teeth in his pate, and dragged him into the water; where the man tooke hold on a stone by chance in his way, and calling to minde he had a knife in his pocket, tooke it out and gave a thrust of it to the beast, which thereupon got away from him into the lake . . It was of the pitch of an ordinary greyhound, of a black slimy skin, without hair, as he imagined (Hardiman 1846, 19).

O'Flaherty goes on to say that such beasts occur in other lakes in Ireland and are known as *Dovarchú* (i.e. *dobharchú* 'otter') or *Anchú* (.i. *onchú*). It is interesting to note here that according to Anne Ross the horned ram-headed serpent was one of the commonest of creatures in the religious iconography of the pagan Celts (Ross 1967, 176ff).

Speaking of lake-dwelling monsters in Ireland Wood-Martin (1902, 379) says, 'Legends of aquatic monsters are very ancient; almost all sheets of water possess their local demon'. Yet lakes are commoner in some parts of Ireland than elsewhere, and lake-dwelling creatures though common everywhere do seem to concentrate in some areas rather than others. According to McEwan one monster each is recorded from counties Clare, Cork, Donegal, Mayo, Roscommon and Wicklow. Two are recorded from Kerry. County Galway, however, boasts no fewer than ten, from the following localities: Lough Abisdealy, Lough Auna, Ballynahinch Lake, between Lough Crolan and Lough Derrylea, Dhulough, Lough Dubh, Lough Fadda, Lough Mask, Lough Nahooin and Shanakeever Lough (McEwan 1986, 206). These places are for the most part, though not exclusively, in West Galway. Now McEwan's list is by no means complete; he lists many Galway monsters probably because Galway was the part of the country with which he was most familiar. Nonetheless it does seem that the West in general has a high incidence of water-monsters. To McEwan's Galway beasts we can add his sightings in Mayo (Achill) and Roscommon (Lough Ree). Danaher tells of a famous *each uisce* in Carrowmore Lake in Mayo and interestingly of a monstrous giant otter in Glenade Lough in Leitrim (Danaher 1964, 98, 100).

The monstrous otter of Glenade Lough is subject of a wealth of folklore that survived until recently and of which some has been described by Patrick Tohall. There were, it is said, two such creatures in the lake in the early eighteenth century. One killed a woman called Grace Connolly, wife of a certain MacLoughlin, while she was washing clothes at the lake-side. As her husband killed the beast it called to its mate, who emerged from the lake and pursued MacLoughlin and his companion, who both fled on horseback. Finally the two men were able to destroy the second otter also. The tomb of Grace Connolly in Conwall churchyard depicts an otter-like creature being stabbed with a knife (Tohall 1948, 127–29; Danaher 1964, 98–9).

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The Leitrim otter is explained as having been the seventh cub of an otter and thus a super otter. Some describe it still as a 'kind of witch that ruled all the other water-animals'. Another informant in the locality described the creature as resembling a horse rather than an otter. Whatever the truth of the death of Grace Connolly, it is clear that we are dealing here with belief in an *onchú*.

Although the citings listed by McEwan, Danaher, Tohall and others are for the most part fairly recent, I assume that the high concentration of water-monsters in Connaught is of ancient origin. Remember also that the *onchú* of *Caithréim Cellaig* was seen in what is now county Mayo. St Mochua of Balla, county Mayo, is believed to have overcome a horrible monster of his locality (Wood-Martin 1902, 377). O'Flaherty's 'crocodile' lived in Lough Mask. It seems that the monsters in question were variously imagined. Yet many were obviously taken to be of the *onchú* tribe. It is significant perhaps that many western monsters are these days called 'water-horse' (*each uisce*). The fabulous creature of Lough Nahanagan, county Wicklow, is believed by some to be a *piast* and by others a water-horse, though the name of the lake would make it an *onchú*. It is likely that water-horses elsewhere were once known as *onchoin*, as for instance was the monsters of Lough Cuilinn and Lough Conn on the one hand and of Lough Mask on the other. If indeed Connaught had a greater incidence of water-monsters (*onchoin*) than elsewhere in Ireland, then it is perhaps not difficult to understand why the Uí Maine of county Galway adopted the *onchú* as their own particular emblem. I would even venture to suggest that the Uí Maine originally had a tradition of an *onchú* that dwelt in one of the lakes of their territory, Lough Rea, for example, and that this animal was originally their 'totem' or special beast. [A word *ongamhás* with the sense 'huge monster' has been recorded from Menlo near Galway City (de Bhaldraithe 1985, 161). De Bhaldraithe cites only one instance of the term where it is used to refer to a very large whale. The word may be a conflation of *onchú* with *uafás* 'horror, monster'. It is possibly significant that ongamhás is recorded from Connaught only].

In all the cases cited by Kennedy, Fox-Davies and MacLysaght the O'Kelly enfield is blazoned 'vert', the heraldic name for green. Vert is a rare colour in heraldry. Pastoureau has made a detailed study of the distribution of heraldic tinctures and has found that nowhere in Western Europe in the period of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century does vert account for any more than 6% at the very most of the heraldic tinctures used (Pastoureau 1979, 116-17) [Curiously the French for 'heraldic green' is not *vert* but *sinople*]. Pastoureau's data do not include Ireland, and a statistical analysis of Irish heraldry of a slightly later period might show that vert was more common in Ireland than elsewhere. Green did , after all, become Ireland's national colour and this fact is reflected in Irish heraldry. It is unlikely nonetheless that the enfield in the O'Kelly crest is green because of Ireland's colour. I think it is much more probable that the enfield is green because it was originally in part a reptile. It is significant that where lizards (evetts, newts) occur in Irish heraldry they are usually blazoned 'vert', e.g. in the arms, or crests, of O'Corrigan (IF, 213), MacGarry (IF, 213), O'Hanlon (IF, 215) and O'Sullivan Beare (IF, 219). When they are blazoned 'proper', that is to say, in their natural colour, they are depicted as green, for example, the arms of MacCotter (IF, 164, 213) and the crest of MacDonagh (IF, 167, 214). Serpents likewise are almost always green, though they are usually blazoned 'proper', for example in the crests of O'Donoghue (IF, 167, 214) and O'Flynn (IF, 169, 214) and in the arms and crest of O'Gallagher (IF, 170, 215). Notice further that the dragon in the crest of FitzPatrick is vert (IF, 214).

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Tadhg Ó Ceallaigh and the Enfield

The enfield incident at the battle of Clontarf is obviously apocryphal, yet there must be some reason for the tradition to have arisen. Family animals tend to become associated with the deaths of chieftains and important ancestors anyway. Tadhg Mór was the man from whom all the Uí Cheallaigh traced descent. If the *onchú*/enfield was already the 'tribal totem' of the family, there would have been a tendency for the animal to have been associated with Tadhg's death. There may be more to the association than that, however.

I have alluded above to a number of instances in Irish literature where the term *onchú* is used to refer to a mighty hero. The word is used in this sense in a poem on the Uí Maine quoted by O'Donovan. The quatrain speaks of the death of Tadhg Mór Ó Ceallaigh at Clontarf and says:

> Trí bliadhna dég 'na dhiaidh sin
> Rémes Taidhg Móir mhic Murchaid
> A cath Briain at rochar Tadhg
> 'Na onchoin a ndiaidh Danmarc (O'Donovan 1843, 99)
>
> [Thirteen year thereafter lasted the reign of Tadhg Mór son of Murchad; Tadhg fell in the battle of Brian [Bóramha] as an *onchú* attacking the Danes].

Is the connection between Tadhg Mór and the *onchú* in this poem pure coincidence, or does it reflect the tendency to link the animal with the ancestor? Is it possible that the association of the O'Kellys with the *onchú* and the equation of Tadhg Mór with the animal were in themselves sufficient to give rise to the legend of the enfield's having guarded his defenceless body from the Danes? These questions cannot be answered without further evidence.

Notice incidentally that Fr John Ryan (1938) has a full account of the Battle of Clontarf and the folklore that grew up around it. He makes no mention of the enfield that guarded O'Kelly, however.

The Onchú as Ireland's National Animal

Hayes-McCoy (1964, 34) produces evidence to show that by the beginning of the seventeenth century the *onchú* was regarded as the animal peculiar to Ireland in the same way as the lion was proper to England and the unicorn to Scotland. If this was indeed so, then it is likely that the *onchú* of Ireland and the enfield of the O'Kellys had already separated in the popular mind by this period and were thought of as different beasts with different names.

I assume that the *onchú* although peculiar to the Uí Maine, had originally had a wider range. As we have seen lake-dwelling monsters seem to have been concentrated in Connaught. Such monsters were apparently equated with the *onchú*. It is also quite likely that the *onchú* was associated with other chiefs and peoples in Connaught.

In a poem on the kings of Ireland Gilla Moduda Ua Casaide describes Tigernán O Rourke (†1172) as *onchú* of Ireland:

> Tigernán tigerna cáith
> Ó Ruairc, rí nósmar nem-thláith;
> ollchú fuar go tairptech tenn,
> onchú uar airgnech Érenn (Macalister 1956, 562)

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[Tigernán, a noble lord, O'Rourke, a distinguished and valiant king; a huge hound cruel and mightily stalwart is he, the unrelenting destructive *onchú* of Ireland].

O'Rourke, lord of Bréifne, at the time of the Norman invasion of Ireland was a close ally of Rory O'Connor and master of a huge swathe of territory from the coast of Sligo in the North West to Ardbraccan and the Boyne in the East. The striking expression *onchú Érenn* is not attested elsewhere, as far as I can ascertain. It is possible that O'Rourke was also associated in some particular manner with the *onchú*. Possibly then this connection was remembered after the Norman conquest and accordingly the *onchú* was linked with the rulers of Ireland in last days of the pre-Norman order. In this way the *onchú* could have become the 'national animal' of Ireland. It is quite possible that the *onchú* was also associated with the O'Connors and Rory O'Connor himself.

The Enfield in Contemporary Grants of Arms

Since the appointment of the first Chief Herald of Ireland in 1943 almost all grants of arms within in the state have been bilingual in form. A full heraldic vocabulary has of necessity been developed to meet the demand for blazons in Irish. This process has not been without its difficulties and uncertainties. On several occasions the Chief Herald has granted arms and crest to people of the surname Kelly and O'Kelly. The enfield has of course figured as the crest in a number of such grants. Since there was apparently no word in Irish for *enfield* the Chief Herald has had recourse to ad hoc Gaelicisations: *infíld* and *einfíld*, or the English word *enfield* has been used unchanged in Irish. Count Ambrose O'Kelly, for example, received a certification of arms from the Genealogical Office in June 1948 and his crest was blazoned in Irish: *Enfield siúlach uaine* 'An enfield passant vert'. Oddly enough, when the late President, Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh received a grant of arms, he was not granted any crest at all. [Alphonse O'Kelly de Galway published a heraldic handbook, *Dictionnaire de la Science du Blason*, vol 1 in Bergerac in 1901. He displays the O'Kelly arms and enfield crest on his title-page and discusses the enfield itself in the body of the work (180-81). He mentions the English name of the beast but apparently knows no other word. His French name is merely a circumlocution: *oiseau-daim multiforme* 'multiform bird-stag']. The highly unsatisfactory expedients used to render *enfield* in Irish are no longer necessary. Future patents of arms containing the heraldic enfield can henceforth use the correct Irish term, and indeed the word from which *enfield* itself derives: *onchú*.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Donal Begley, Chief Herald of Ireland, and to Professor F. J. Byrne, for drawing my attention to references which I would otherwise have missed.

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